

Message from Pastor John
June 28, 2020
“A Little Goes a Long Way”

Jeremiah 29:11-13

11 For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the LORD, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope. 12 Then when you call upon me and come and pray to me, I will hear you. 13 When you search for me, you will find me; if you seek me with all your heart,

Luke 13:18-21

18 He said therefore, “What is the kingdom of God like? And to what should I compare it? 19 It is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in the garden; it grew and became a tree, and the birds of the air made nests in its branches.”

20 And again he said, “To what should I compare the kingdom of God? 21 It is like yeast that a woman took and mixed in with three measures of flour until all of it was leavened.”

The Superpower of the time, the Babylonian Empire had swept through the land of Israel, destroyed almost everything. Taking all the best and brightest of the people off into exile. It seemed to many that God’s Chosen People had been destroyed and that God’s Promises had come to nothing.

It was to those in exile, living at least as second-class servants if not as outright slaves that Jeremiah addressed these words:

For surely, I know the plans I have for you, says the LORD, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope. 12 Then when you call upon me and come and pray to me, I will hear you. 13 When you search for me, you will find me; if you seek me with all your heart,

Words not just of promise and hope but words of comfort to a lost and defeated people. Jeremiah affirms that God is still active, that God is still there, that God’s will shall be done BUT he also tells us we need to trust and look.

God made a covenant, a contract, with Israel but Israel must keep its side of the deal.

It was customary that even invading superpowers like Babylon issued covenants with tribes and nations. Archeology has proved that usually they followed the same pattern:

“we the superior controlling authority will keep law & order, protect you from other nations, ensure trade ...etc..... IF AND ON CONDITION THAT you the subjects” obey and serve and do not rebel, and supply so much grain ,etc.....”

Jeremiah is reminding the people of their older covenant with the ultimate supreme power, God. He is telling them that no matter what situation they were in, no matter what earthly authority controlled them...ultimately God was above all and in charge of all.

Keep worshipping and believing in the Lord and keep seeing the Lord’s presence all around you, have patience for with the Lord all will be well.

It is no wonder that this Jeremiah passage has long been a source of comfort for anyone who finds themselves lost, exiled, feeling that their life is out of control and that disaster looms just over the horizon.

But let us focus on our side of the agreement.

Some have said that Jesus lived at a time when “everyone had faith” and that today we live in a society where faith, religion is seen as a pastime of a minority. That is not completely true. Jesus lived in a time when everybody had some kind of belief system in some kind of God. I would argue that most people today still follow some kind belief system, usually expressed in secular rather than religious terms.

What is true of Jesus’s time and of the exiles in Babylon many centuries before, is that amongst the faithful there was no hope. They felt that their nations best days were in the past and that God had largely gone out of sight. An opinion I still hear voiced today.

The response of Jeremiah and Jesus was and still is, that God is not distant and indifferent, God is not a powerless vacuum having no effect our lives and world.

God is near.

What is necessary is that we remember our side of the covenant deal. We must always look and listen and will find signs of God in the world all around us.

In Luke we find Jesus's parables of the Mustard Seed and the Yeast in which He is teaching us that when even when we feel our faith and God's presence to be tiny, insignificant, of no value..... that we will discover that it is alive and growing and that it has within it the capacity for transformation.

As tiny as a little seed or a pinch of yeast might be, in it is power and hope and life. Our part of the covenant is to hang on and never give up. Not easy in very situation but staying alert will be a revelation.

Jesus' own faith was based on his people's experience of God throughout history. He knew that the Babylonian exiles had returned, that the Temple in Jerusalem had been re-built. That the promises of God had not evaporated. That God had been there, active and compassionate during the best and the worst of times. He also knew that in his time life was tough, the glory days had passed, hope elusive and faith difficult.

Our faith is based on following Jesus and we can't understand much of what he says without taking Israel's faith seriously, which is why the Old Testament in general and specifically in this moment, Jeremiah's prophecy, are relevant and necessary to us, today.

Hearing God's message through Jesus: taking him seriously: trying as best we can to follow His example; continuing to wrestle with His meaning; playing an active part in the continuing community of believers...all of these will make our tiny seeds and pinches of yeast multiply.

Saying "yes" to Jesus will reveal the reality of God, will show us that we are not alone, that we are not abandoned, that we are nor our own makers and keepers. If we have eyes to see and ears to hear than as we travel through life we will feel secure in God's keeping.

Even though it is about a small village on the coast, battered by the ocean tides, I think landlocked Midwesterners will understand R.S.Thomas's meaning in his poem "The Other".

"There are nights that are so still that I can hear the small owl calling far off and a fox barking miles away. It is then that I lie in the lean hours awake-- listening to the swell born somewhere in the Atlantic.

Rising and falling, wave upon wave on the long shore by the village that is without light and companionless. And the thought comes of that other being who is awake too, letting our prayers break on him. Not like this for a few hours, but for days, for years, for eternity."

OR in Jeremiah's words: "the Lord plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope. 12 Then when you call upon me and come and pray to me, I will hear you. 13 When you search for me, you will find me; if you seek me with all your heart."

Amen.